

## Editors' Introduction

*Brian Cowan and Elizabeth Elbourne*

**T**his issue of the *Journal of British Studies* begins with language and ends with feeling. Our first three authors, Gwilym Dodd, Jason Peacey, and William J. Bulman, explore aspects of public communication, ranging from the language of bureaucracy to the politics of theater. Gordon Pentland and Lydia Murdoch address in their different ways the unexpected, and often private, ripple effects of two major political crises, the assassination of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval in 1812 and the Indian rebellion of 1857. Nicola Verdon considers emotion, belief, and pleasure in her exploration of the rise of the middle-class woman farmer in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while Claire Langhamer tackles the history of emotion directly in her analysis of the mid-twentieth-century debate over capital punishment and the politics of emotion. In their different ways, then, all of these articles consider ways in which the private and the public intersected.

We begin with Gwilym Dodd's article, "Trilingualism in the Medieval English Bureaucracy: The Use—and Disuse—of Languages in the Fifteenth-Century Privy Seal Office," which uses a careful study of the records of the medieval English state to illuminate certain patterns of written language used by bureaucrats working for the English crown. Dodd demonstrates that the fifteenth century was a period of unprecedented linguistic change, particularly with reference to the choice of written languages in official state documents produced by the Privy Seal Office. English, French, and Latin all served as official languages of state during the Middle Ages, and Dodd's article shows that the use of these different languages has its own history and was the product of the many decisions made by the polyglot scribes who worked for the English bureaucracy. The vernaculars of French and English were both used as languages of medieval government, even if the latter can be seen gaining popularity over the course of the fifteenth century, but the "real linguistic headline of the fifteenth century," Dodd argues, is "the replacement of the vernacular languages by Latin" (278–79). The choice of language used in official documents, Dodd states, may have owed more to changing procedures and scribal preferences than to broader cultural shifts or political factors. The languages of state had their own logic, it seems, and this article explores those rationales with great care and precision.

In "Print, Publicity, and Popularity: The Projecting of Sir Balthazar Gerbier, 1642–1662," Jason Peacey explores the expressive choices made by a seventeenth-century media entrepreneur, or a "projector" in contemporary parlance, named

Sir Balthazar Gerbier. Peacey rescues Gerbier from the condescension of posterity by reconsidering him not as a laughably naive projector or dilettante but as a media-savvy master of the new communicative possibilities of the mid-seventeenth century. Gerbier is shown to be well aware of the potential benefits of exploiting the new printed media of the day, especially the emergent genre of newspaper publishing. Gerbier's public relations efforts use print effectively to promote his reformist agendas and to lobby a broad audience without sacrificing attention to more targeted efforts through oral or scribal communication as well. As such, Gerbier offers a useful case study in the uses of "popularity" in Stuart culture. Gerbier sought to be popular mainly to achieve widespread support for his projects, and he consciously sought to engage a non-elite audience for his work, but he did not, Peacey argues, wish to increase the political power of the disenfranchised, nor did he wish to make political life more transparent. Thus Peacey concludes by reminding us that "not everyone at the time equated the [seventeenth-century] media revolution with popular political engagement, participation, and liberation" (307).

William J. Bulman's article, "Publicity and Popery on the Restoration Stage: Elkanah Settle's *The Empress of Morocco* in Context," also addresses the politics of publicity in Stuart England by elucidating the ways in which dramatic entertainment could serve as a means of exploring matters of great political importance such as the rightful succession to the throne. The playwright Elkanah Settle's 1673 tragicomedy *The Empress of Morocco* appears in this article as a particularly poignant appeal by supporters of "loyalist" Catholicism and proponents of the indefeasible legitimacy of both Stuarts—King Charles II and his brother James, the Duke of York—claim to the throne, to a broad play-going public for support. The result is an understanding of the Restoration theater as thoroughly politicized and key to the public relations strategy of the restored monarchy. King Charles II "restored the London theater scene at his own restoration so that it could serve as a forum for public politics that worked for the monarchy, not against it" (339). Bulman's article reinforces a growing trend by historians to take the stage seriously as a venue for political debate, and his work here complements an article recently published by Hannah Smith in this journal.<sup>1</sup>

Gordon Pentland, in "'Now the great Man in the Parliament House is dead, we shall have a big Loaf!' Responses to the Assassination of Spencer Perceval," looks at the ramifications of Spencer Perceval's assassination in 1812. The murder has often been seen as the act of a deranged individual, and thus tragic but not enormously informative for the historian. Pentland argues that, on the contrary, the assassination opens a revealing window onto "a year of profound crisis in the British state" (341). Although alarmed elites tried to present the assassination as not politically motivated, it was in fact used by a variety of groups to a variety of political ends. There are many reports of public rejoicing at Spencer's death, for example, while Bellingham was feted in certain circles as a surprisingly heroic figure, driven to extremity by the government's denial of constitutional rights, including the right to petition. The event also triggered debate about the meaning of assassination and the relationship between the public and private. Pentland's essay

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Smith, "Politics, Patriotism, and Gender: The Standing Army Debate on the English Stage, circa 1689–1720," *Journal of British Studies* 50, no. 1 (January 2011): 48–75.

is, as he points out, part of a recent revival of scholarly interest in the relatively neglected war years of 1800–1815.

Lydia Murdoch also considers unexpected reactions to public disaster, in her case the Indian rebellion of 1857. In “‘Suppressed Grief’: Mourning the Death of British Children and the Memory of the 1857 Indian Rebellion,” she shows how British women were unable adequately to mark and to mourn the deaths of children according to British cultural conventions during the rebellion. This was particularly true during the siege of Lucknow, which Murdoch studies in detail through diaries, letters, and memoirs, revealing a community under severe stress. The apparent chaos and senselessness of children’s deaths experienced by British survivors of the siege were not, however, retained in public memory concerning the rebellion; such trauma undercut the British sense of what they were doing in India. Smoother narratives about the conflict prevailed, omitting accounts of child death that could not be represented as the idealized “beautiful death.” Murdoch looks at how private and public memory intersected and often spoke past one another. She is thus interested in the “blurred boundaries between private and public, individual and collective memory, personal and collective grief” (367).

The story of the rise of women to professional status in the late nineteenth century is a well-known one. Less well known, however, is the wave of interest in farming as a professional career for middle- and upper-class women. In “Business and Pleasure: Middle-Class Women’s Work and the Professionalization of Farming in England, 1890–1939,” Nicola Verdon looks both at the feminization of farming and at changes in farming itself in the years before the Second World War. Before the greater concentration of farming into fewer hands, with the postwar rise of large-scale commercial agriculture, small-scale farming was seen by many as a career for women that might revitalize the countryside even as it also resolved problems such as the rise of the spinster and the supposed degeneration of the population. Many more women than have been accounted for by historians enthusiastically took up what was still an unusual female career; Verdon brings them back to life.

Claire Langhamer’s article, “‘The Live Dynamic Whole of Feeling and Behavior’: Capital Punishment and the Politics of Emotion, 1945–1957,” asks how the British debated the abolition of capital punishment in the immediate postwar years. Her interest, however, is not so much the overall thrust of debate as the politics of emotion. Her principal source is the archive of Mass Observation, which deliberately sought for information about people’s feelings on the issue. Langhamer investigates not only how emotion was described and deployed by respondents to surveys such as those of Mass Observation but also how public debate turned precisely on the relative importance of emotion and reason in this type of discussion. Was emotion to be distrusted or should it be taken account of in public policy debates?

Our next issue will be devoted entirely to exploring the new field of British queer history. It will include articles ranging in time from the seventeenth through the twentieth century, and it will be guest edited by Brian Lewis.

Finally, we invite papers for a special forum on all aspects of food history. The topic of food history has become increasingly rich and complicated in recent years, as historians have taken up themes as diverse as the history of consumption, the circulation of trade goods through imperial networks, the history of particular items, the cultural meanings of cooking, and the history of dearth, hunger, and

famine. We would like to consider the current state of the field. Articles can cover any period from the Middle Ages to the present day. They should be 10,000–12,000 words long, follow *JBS* formatting guidelines, and be submitted by 1 June 2012. Please see the North American Conference on British Studies or the *JBS* website for further details.